

III. REGIONAL LAND USERS

Current Users of Denali Highway Lands

A distinction is made by the State of Alaska between recreational users and commercial users, with commercial users subject to permitting and leasing requirements. A wide variety of recreational uses are allowed on Denali Highway lands (see Generally Allowed Uses, above), and are reflected in the activities seen in the region. The Denali Highway and the Denali Blocks experience a variety of users throughout the summer, both by tourists from outside Alaska and by state residents. The Tangle Lakes and the streams flowing into and out of them attract fishermen, canoeists, rafters and motor boat users. Mountain bikers and OHV riders utilize regional trails, while hikers, berry pickers, nature/bird watchers and photographers hike the trails or strike across country. Campers utilize the campgrounds found along the highway as well as make their own near highway pullouts. Hunters become the dominant group in late summer and fall, focusing largely on the caribou migrating through the region, but hunting moose and bear as well. Winter use of the Denali Highway is much reduced, in part because the highway is not plowed for vehicular traffic, but is utilized by snow machiners, dog mushers and hunters.

Current commercial users of Denali Highway lands include guiding (hunting, fishing and birding) and mining operations. Placer mining operations are currently underway in the Eureka and Rainy Creek areas of Denali Block I, and the Valdez and Windy Creek regions of Denali Block II. Valdez and Windy Creeks also have small hard rock mining operations in progress.

Land Use on Adjacent Bureau of Land Management Lands

BLM, like the State of Alaska, differentiates between recreational and commercial users. Recreational users are allowed to use BLM lands similarly to users of State lands. Commercial users need a special “recreation use permit” to cross the Delta Wild and Scenic River Corridor as well as other BLM land. Commercial activities on federal lands also need to take the NEPA and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) into account when considering possible impacts to the natural and cultural environment.

Projected Regional Land Users

Amount and type of recreational use and subsistence on Denali Highway lands may remain roughly the same in the near and intermediate future, with a slow steady growth in visitation, presuming conditions remain the same. A change in ease of access, such as paving the Denali Highway, will alter this situation. Tourism and in-state visitation would both experience a considerable increase (BUCY associates 1999).

Remote sensing and geophysical data recorded by the State of Alaska, BLM and mining interests indicate the potential existence of one or more large ultramafic intrusive bodies running roughly east-southeast and west-northwest across much of the region (Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys/Bureau of Land Management 2003). These findings have generated increased interest in the mineral potential of the region, and exploration is being conducted by mining interests in the Denali Blocks to determine if any commercially viable mineral deposits exist.

Department of Natural Resources Collaboration with Bureau of Land Management

DNR and BLM are working jointly on management and resource protection issues in the Denali Highway region. DNR/DMLW and BLM Interpretation are evaluating materials for interpretive panels along the Denali Highway, and are collaborating on the writing of a pamphlet. BLM Cultural Resources has supplied DNR/OHA with background information on TLAD management issues. The two agencies have worked closely on site monitoring and survey modeling for archaeological sites in the region, and are considering several future joint monitoring and interpretation projects.

Existing Memoranda of Agreements with Bureau of Land Management

The Alaska SHPO has entered into two memoranda of agreements with BLM since 1971 regarding the management of the TLAD. In 1980 BLM signed a memorandum of agreement with the Alaska SHPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to regulate OHV use in the TLAD. This MOA is still in effect, but should be updated to correct imprecise wording and differences in application of the OHV restrictions between BLM and OHA.

A second MOA was reviewed and signed in 1987. This document proposed BLM actions to alleviate threats to cultural resources in the TLAD. These activities have been completed or rendered unnecessary when the boundaries of the TLAD were redrawn in 1993 (McCoy and Dodson 1994: 11).